

GREGORY SHIMER

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Re: Support of SB1076 - AID IN DEATH AND DYING

To the Honorable Members of the Connecticut Public Health Committee:

Many of you know my story, I am the husband of the late Tracey Gamer-Fanning, co-founder of the Connecticut Brain Tumor Alliance (CTBTA). I am also a son who lost his mother in 2015 after three bouts with lung cancer. Her name was Susan Shimer of Vernon, CT. I am an active father, community member, cancer advocate and the occasional Marvel movie enthusiast.

I am one of many people you have heard from over the years. You have heard our stories, felt our pain as we retell them again and again, and you clearly empathize our roles in life – both as caregivers and surviving family.

I want to put it very plainly here in this letter – **no one should suffer during their final event if it can be helped, no one.** We don't allow our pets to suffer when it's their time, yet we warehouse our old, sick and dying in group homes and hospital wings waiting for them to expire like a piece of fruit. The lucky ones get to die at home, but they still soil their beds, exhaust their caregiving family, scream in the middle of the night from pain and then and only then – do they get thrown into a body bag and wheeled out the front door in front of everyone.

Is that truly what our opponents want? Do they want scenes like this to happen over and over again, do they really want the people whom they love and that others love to simply waste away in a drug-addled fog, vomiting, screaming, moaning and crying?

Of course not – they love their families, their friends and their loved ones too – but they are flawed in thinking that truly is “Life”. In that form, its warehousing, it's putting human beings on a shelf and in the grand scheme of things – it's cruel.

My wife used to say ... “Its better to live a full half-life, than an half, full-life” She meant it. We would talk about it for hours on end. that quality of life is much better than quantity. She died at 48 of a brain tumor. But she helped thousands of people, hundreds of families, inspired even more around the country and built an organization that will continue her message for years to come. She knew she was going to die – just didn't know when.

When we finally learned that her brain tumor doubled in size in September of 2018 – we knew we were done. We had fought and fought for years. Enduring surgeries, chemo, radiation, more surgery, seizures, pain, countless naps and reactions to medications and more – that was her life that most people didn't see. They saw the inspiring and beautiful who learned to crack the code in life and appreciate every waking second.

If she had this choice – and that's what it is – a choice – she would have chosen a date, thrown a party with cupcakes and 80s music. She would have hugged everyone that was there and told them how important they were to her. They would have cried, laughed, puffed on a water bong and ate in unison to a life well-lived.

That wasn't the way she died – she died like most of the people you will hear from today. Many of them (I am one of them) have appeared in front of you several years in a row, retelling their stories, reliving their trauma, thinking they could have done more and walk with that guilt for the rest of their lives – only to hear from our opponents that they should have fought more, fought to the end – what makes them think they didn't?

Completing one's life is just as important as celebrating a birthday or a new baby or marriage – it's a life event. It shouldn't be traumatic; it shouldn't involve pain and suffering. It should involve love, caring, comfort, support and most of all – dignity.

This is the year. This is the year that this important choice should go to the floor and be voted upon. Those in favor understand compassion and that all this law does is give people a choice.

There is no slippery slope here – there is no slope – only a path to dignity and compassion.

My wife died several weeks later in bed at home. She couldn't move, could barely speak and thought our cat was climbing the ceiling at night. She was hallucinating, screaming, crying and dying, painfully. Her own mother saw her choke on her mucus during her death throes.

This bill must pass. The choice must be there for those who want it. For those who don't want it, that's fine that's their choice. Free will is one of God's great gifts to us, He didn't want to impose His will upon us, He gave us the gift of free will, and He continues to give it. We must honor that gift, just like we honor life.

No law should be against the principle of free will and choice. Please pass this bill and give the residents of Connecticut a shred of their dignity back so they can die – in peace and with dignity.

With respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, featuring a large, stylized 'G' and 'S' that are interconnected. The signature is written on a light-colored background.

Gregory Shimer